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English Pop Songs as an Informal Language Learning Space: A Phenomenological Study of Senior High School Students' Experiences in Developing Speaking Skills

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Abstract (10 pt)
Penelitian mengenai lagu-lagu berbahasa Inggris dalam pendidikan bahasa sebagian besar dirancang untuk mengukur hasil pembelajaran (outcomes), dan relatif sedikit perhatian yang diberikan pada bagaimana pembelajar secara nyata menghayati (live through) kontak harian mereka dengan lagu-lagu tersebut. Penelitian ini meneliti pengalaman yang dihayati (lived experience) oleh siswa SMA yang berinteraksi dengan lagu-lagu pop berbahasa Inggris di luar kelas, beserta cara mereka menghubungkan pengalaman tersebut dengan kemampuan berbicara mereka. Desain kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi Husserl dilakukan di SMA Negeri 2 Bantul, Yogyakarta, antara bulan Juni dan Juli 2026. Empat siswa dipilih secara purposive. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam terstruktur moderat (semi-structured), observasi non-partisipan menggunakan lembar indikator perilaku berisi tiga belas poin, serta dokumentasi daftar putar (playlist) lagu para partisipan. Analisis data mengikuti model Moustakas, yang bergerak dari horisonalisasi (horizonalization), deskripsi tekstural dan struktural, hingga deskripsi komposit mengenai esensinya. Delapan puluh tiga pernyataan signifikan dikelompokkan ke dalam empat belas tema lintas partisipan. Awal mula keterlibatan dalam pengalaman ini tidak pernah timbul dari inisiatif sendiri, melainkan selalu dimediasi oleh teman sebaya, algoritma rekomendasi, atau tayangan televisi masa kecil. Persepsi terhadap lagu sebagai media pembelajaran terbukti bersifat dinamis dan tidak tetap; seorang partisipan menganggap ruang kelas formal lebih alami daripada lagu, sebuah pandangan yang bertolak belakang dengan partisipan lainnya. Kontribusi yang dilaporkan terhadap kemampuan berbicara terletak pada artikulasi/pengucapan (pronunciation) dan kelancaran (fluency), serta yang lebih menarik adanya pembalikan perbandingan sosial (social comparison), di mana teman sebaya yang lebih lancar tidak lagi dianggap sebagai ancaman melainkan menjadi panutan (role model). Esensi dari pengalaman ini terletak pada pergeseran intensionalitas, dari lagu yang ditawarkan oleh perantara eksternal menjadi lagu yang dihayati sebagai ruang untuk melatih diri dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris.

Keywords: lagu pop bahasa Inggris; pembelajaran bahasa informal; keterampilan berbicara; fenomenologi; pengalaman yang dihayati

Abstract
Research on English songs in language education has largely been designed to measure outcomes, and comparatively little attention has been given to how learners actually live through their everyday contact with such songs. This study examined the lived experience of senior high school students who interact with English pop songs outside the classroom, together with the way they relate that experience to their speaking ability. A qualitative design following Husserlian phenomenology was carried out at SMA Negeri 2 Bantul, Yogyakarta, between June and July 2026. Four students were selected purposively. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation using a sheet of thirteen behavioural indicators, and documentation of the

participants' song playlists. Analysis followed Moustakas, moving from horizonalization through textural and structural description to a composite description of the essence. Eighty-three significant statements were clustered into fourteen cross-participant themes. Entry into the experience was never self-initiated, since it was mediated in every case by a peer, a recommendation algorithm, or childhood television. Perception of songs as a learning medium proved dynamic rather than settled, and one participant judged the formal classroom more natural than songs, a position directly opposed to that of another participant. The reported contribution to speaking lay in pronunciation and fluency, and, more strikingly, in a reversal of social comparison through which a more fluent peer ceased to be a threat and became a model. The essence lies in a shift of intentionality, from a song offered by an external intermediary to a song lived through as a space for practising an English-speaking self.

***Keywords**: English pop songs; informal language learning; speaking skills; phenomenology; lived experience*

1. Introduction

English reaches Indonesian adolescents long before it reaches them as a school subject. Songs, films, games, and short-video platforms carry the language into ordinary hours of the day, and for many students the volume of that contact far exceeds what a weekly English period can supply (Lee, 2019). Generation Z meets English mainly in settings no syllabus governs, through material chosen for pleasure rather than assigned for study (Wolanin, 2025). Pop songs hold a particular place in this ecology. They are streamed on Spotify and YouTube, clipped on TikTok, quoted in captions, and replayed until the words are known by heart (Judijanto et al., 2024). English in this form is a cultural practice well before it is curriculum content.

The pedagogical value of popular culture has been established fairly firmly. Teaching materials built from popular culture raise participation because the content already belongs to students' lives (Sudiran et al., 2020). Classroom approaches drawing on popular texts reach learners across different levels of ability and make the learning environment more inclusive (Bal et al., 2023). Out-of-class engagement with films, songs, and English-language online media supports the growth of learner autonomy, particularly among more proficient learners (Chan, 2016), and Generation Z learners themselves report gains in vocabulary, accent recognition, and confidence from consuming English media (Aprilia et al., 2025).

Where speaking is concerned, the evidence points consistently in one direction. Songs improve articulation and pronunciation quality among junior high school learners (Siki et al., 2024) and help EFL students master particular fricative sounds (Febiola et al., 2025). A quasi-experimental study reported gains in lexical complexity, accuracy, and fluency once songs were integrated into instruction (Kitjaroonchai & Sukman, 2025). Students perceive songs as improving their pronunciation (Judijanto et al., 2024), English popular culture shapes learning motivation positively (Purwantoro et al., 2025), and structured speaking practice organised around club activity produces comparable improvement (Harsul Lisan & Subir, 2024). Perception studies report broadly favourable attitudes toward songs used inside and outside class (Kusendang & Dwimaulani, 2025; Pangaribuan & Chairunnissa, 2023; Zakly et al., 2025).

What most of these studies share is a design that treats the song as a treatment. The song is introduced, an outcome is measured, and the difference between conditions is reported. Designs of that kind answer the question of whether songs work. They do not reach the question of what happens when nobody has introduced anything, when a student puts on a

playlist at eleven at night because the house has finally gone quiet. Informal digital learning of English is driven by affective variables and by the learner's own choices rather than by instruction (Lee & Drajati, 2019), and a large share of second language vocabulary is picked up outside the classroom through exposure the learner initiates (Reynolds, 2023). Listening to a song, working out what a lyric means, and imitating a singer are acts of consciousness. They involve attention, interpretation, and the making of meaning, none of which a post-treatment score can describe.

Phenomenology addresses experience at precisely this level. It asks how a phenomenon is lived through and what it means to the person living it, rather than how large an effect it produces (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Neubauer et al., 2019). Husserl's account of intentionality holds that consciousness is always consciousness of something, directed toward an object through the meaning the subject confers upon it (Hasbiansyah, 2008; Taufiqurrahman, 2022). Read through that lens, an English pop song is an intentional object within a student's awareness, and the relation between the two has a structure worth describing in its own right. Phenomenological inquiry in English language teaching remains comparatively uncommon, although its suitability for questions of this kind has been argued at length (Bonyadi, 2023; Englander & Morley, 2023).

This study therefore approached English pop songs as an informal learning space that students inhabit rather than a medium they are given. Three questions guided the inquiry. First, what are students' experiences of listening to English pop songs in their daily lives? Second, how do students perceive these songs as an informal medium for learning English? Third, how do students describe the contribution of these songs to the development of their English speaking skills?

2. Method

a. Design

A qualitative design was used, with a phenomenological approach in the Husserlian tradition. The choice followed from the aim of the study. Nothing was being measured here and no intervention was administered, so a design capable of describing lived experience from the inside was required (Leavy, 2022). Analysis followed the procedures set out by Moustakas as presented in Creswell and Poth (2017). Epoché was maintained throughout, meaning that the researcher worked to hold prior assumptions about the benefit of songs in suspension so that they would not govern the reading of the data (Barnawi & Darojat, 2018; Bonyadi, 2023).

b. Site, timeline, and participants

Fieldwork was carried out at SMA Negeri 2 Bantul, Jalan RA Kartini No. 44, Trirenggo, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. Non-participant observation opened the fieldwork on 19 June 2026, and in-depth interviews followed on 19 June, 23 June, and 19 July 2026. All interviews were held in the school library, which was quiet enough for students to talk about private listening habits without an audience.

Four students took part, referred to throughout by initials as FRM, NI, NE, and WAS. Selection was purposive against four criteria: active enrolment at the school during the 2025/2026 academic year, a routine of listening to English pop songs through digital platforms outside class hours, an ability to reflect on and verbally articulate that experience, and voluntary willingness to be interviewed. Four

participants were judged adequate on the principle of information power, under which a narrow aim, a homogeneous sample, and dialogic interviewing lower the number of cases a qualitative study requires (Malterud et al., 2016).

c. Data collection

Three techniques were combined. In-depth interviewing served as the primary technique, using a semi-structured guide organised around four main topics with follow-up probes. Sessions ran between 13 and 44 minutes and were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. WAS was interviewed twice, since noise disrupted the opening minutes of the first session; the second session completed the narrative and also functioned as member checking of statements that had remained ambivalent.

Non-participant observation was conducted in the school library using a sheet of thirteen behavioural indicators covering students' engagement with English-language music, among them singing along, quoting lyrics, and using English expressions spontaneously. Documentation consisted of screenshots of each participant's English song playlist together with photographs taken during observation. Documentary material was not treated as primary data but as contextual evidence and as part of the audit trail (Fiantika et al., 2022; Pahleviannur et al., 2022).

d. Data analysis

Analysis proceeded through four stages. The researcher first wrote a description of his own experience of the phenomenon in order to make personal assumptions visible before engaging the data. Horizonalization followed, in which every statement relevant to the phenomenon was extracted from the transcripts and given equal initial weight, with no statement privileged over another (Barnawi & Darojat, 2018). Eighty-three significant statements were produced in this way. These were then clustered into meaning units, yielding textural descriptions of what participants experienced and structural descriptions of how that experience unfolded in consciousness. A composite description of the essence integrated the textural and structural accounts into a single narrative of the deepest meaning of the phenomenon.

e. Trustworthiness

Four criteria were applied together (Murdiyanto, 2020). Credibility rested on technique triangulation across interview, observation, and documentation, and on member checking with WAS across her two sessions. Transferability was pursued through thick textural and structural description, including direct quotation and situational context, so that readers may judge the relevance of the findings to their own settings without any claim of statistical generalisation. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail recording the date, time, duration, and location of every session, along with technical disruptions such as library noise, which were logged rather than concealed. Confirmability rested on epoché, the clearest evidence of which is the retention of findings that ran against the common assumption in the literature, notably the ambivalent position of NE.

f. Ethical considerations

Permission was obtained from the school principal before fieldwork began. Participation was voluntary, participants consented to being recorded, and identities are protected by the use of initials throughout the transcripts, the observation sheets, and this report.

3. Results and Discussion

a. Findings

1) The participants and the architecture of the findings

The four participants shared a single phenomenon while entering and inhabiting it in markedly different ways. Table 1 sets their characteristics side by side, and the variation visible there recurs across every theme discussed below.

Table 1. Profile of the participants and their patterns of engagement

Participant	Entry pathway	Main platform	Dominant mode of engagement	Organisation of the collection	Observed indicators
FRM	Recommendation from one peer during school orientation in grade 7	Spotify	Active singing along and imitation of the singer's pronunciation	Four playlists separated by mood and activity	6 of 13
NI	Junior high school friendship circle, reinforced by one figure	Spotify and YouTube	Active listening while deliberately searching for the meaning of the lyrics	A single mixed playlist, not separated by mood	3 of 13
NE	Passive exposure to pop songs on television in childhood	Spotify	Predominantly background listening while studying and sleeping	Several playlists, including one of roughly seven hours for sleeping	6 of 13
WAS	TikTok clips, later shifting to full-song listening	TikTok and Spotify	Predominantly background listening, with the most spontaneous use of English	Separate playlists for sad and cheerful songs	8 of 13

Note. Participants are identified by initials only. Observed indicators refer to the thirteen behavioural indicators recorded on the observation sheet.

Eighty-three significant statements were clustered into fourteen cross-participant themes distributed across the three research questions, and those themes in turn supported three invariant structures. Figure 1 traces that analytical path so that the whole architecture of the findings can be held in view before the detail of each theme is examined.

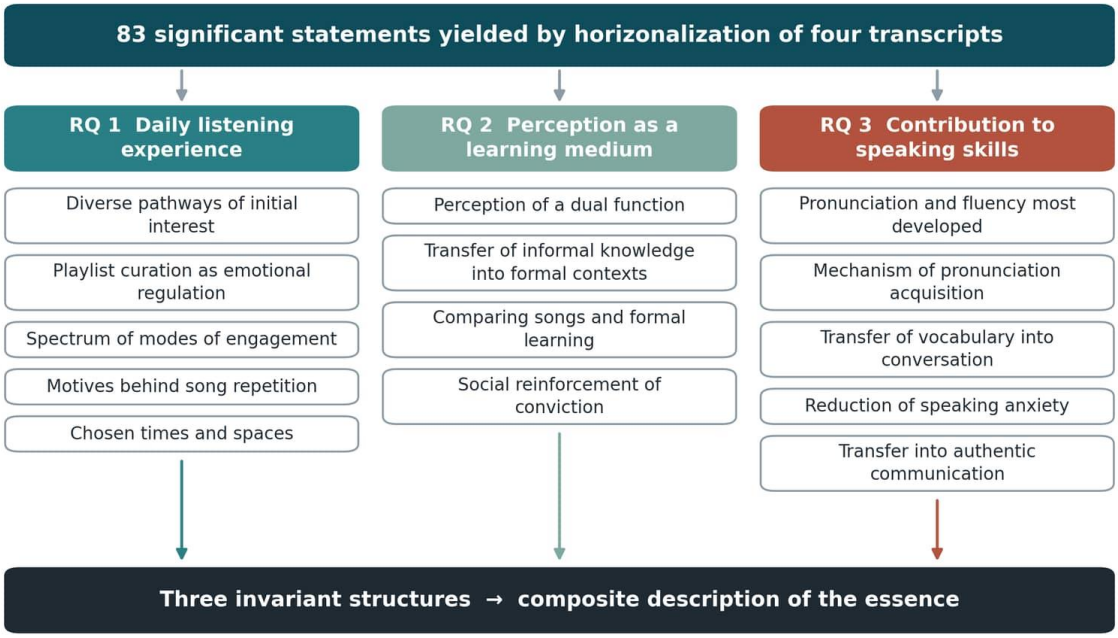


Figure 1. Analytical path form significant statement to the description of the essence

Table 2 shows how the fourteen themes were distributed across the four participants. The table is arranged so that the form a theme took in each account can be read across a single row, because the analytical value of the study lies in the variation of a theme's manifestation rather than in its presence or absence. Cells marked as not prominent indicate that the theme did not emerge distinctly in that participant's account, and such absences are reported as data rather than treated as gaps to be filled.

Table 2. Distribution of the fourteen themes across the four participants

Theme	FRM	NI	NE	WAS
RQ1 Diverse pathways of initial interest	Personal relationship with one peer	Collective junior high friendship, one figure	Passive exposure to television in childhood	The TikTok algorithm, later Spotify
RQ1 Playlist curation as emotional regulation	Explicit and deliberate; four playlists by mood	Not prominent; a single mixed playlist	Organised more organically over time	Explicit; sad and cheerful playlists kept apart
RQ1 Spectrum of modes of engagement	Active; singing considered essential	Active; oriented toward the meaning of lyrics	Peripheral; background to study and sleep	Peripheral, turning active when producing content
RQ1 Motives behind song repetition	Repetition deepens interpretation	Repetition for aesthetic enjoyment	Repetition out of personal attachment	Intense but short-lived

				until a new favourite
RQ1 Chosen times and spaces	Late afternoon and late at night while studying	At night, when the house is quiet	A playlist of about seven hours for sleep	Before sleeping, as an aid to falling asleep
RQ2 Perception of a dual function	Firm and balanced, described as fifty to fifty	Firm and balanced	Cautious and conditional; dislikes English lessons	Developed from hesitancy to affirmation
RQ2 Transfer of informal knowledge into formal contexts	A song lyric appeared in an examination item	Vocabulary from a song recognised in a try-out	Songs fill the absence of explicit vocabulary teaching	Vocabulary and speaking used in a video assignment
RQ2 Comparing songs and formal learning	Songs are more natural and free of pressure	Divided; pronunciation authority stays with the teacher	The classroom is more natural because pressure aids focus	Songs are more relaxed than translating on the spot
RQ2 Social reinforcement of conviction	The example of a classmate, Salsa	The example of a peer fluent in public speaking	Not prominent	Reciprocal recommendation among friends
RQ3 Pronunciation and fluency most developed	Explicit; pronunciation named as improving most	Explicit; describes herself as now fluent	Explicit; less afraid to speak than in junior high	Moderate; improvement described as gradual
RQ3 Mechanism of pronunciation acquisition	External verification through online searching	Internal compensation by omitting difficult syllables	Not prominent	Not prominent
RQ3 Transfer of vocabulary into conversation	Slang, sometimes coarse, used spontaneously	Predominantly coarse vocabulary	Collective; lyrics quoted with peers almost daily	Neutral expressions such as what if
RQ3 Reduction of speaking anxiety	Complete; insecurity turned into confidence	Complete; the more fluent peer became a model	Partial; more confident but still afraid of accent	Partial; still afraid of being suddenly called on
RQ3 Transfer of competence into authentic situations	An exchange with a foreign speaker in Bali	Not prominent	Spontaneous use in everyday school conversation	An English video assignment at school

Note. Not prominent indicates that the theme did not emerge distinctly in that participant's account. Such absences are reported as data rather than treated as gaps.

2) Listening to English pop songs in daily life

Five themes emerged under the first research question. The first concerns the way the experience began. No participant arrived at English pop songs alone. FRM was introduced by a single close peer during the school orientation period in grade seven, NI through the friendship circle of her junior high school and one figure within it, WAS through TikTok clips that later drew her to full songs on Spotify, and NE through pop songs heard on television in childhood and reactivated during adolescence.

"During the orientation period in grade 7 of junior high, I met a friend of mine named Kansa. She had always liked Western music." (FRM)

"It started from TikTok, from edited video clips. Then I started listening to the full songs on Spotify." (WAS)

Figure 2 sets out the relation among these four pathways. What the figure makes visible is not the difference among the intermediaries alone but the invariant structure lying beneath that difference, since in none of the four cases did the song appear in the student's consciousness as an object sought out independently. The intermediaries themselves differed in kind. For FRM and NI they were personal and relational, working through face-to-face interaction. For WAS the intermediary was algorithmic and digital, and for NE it was passive and historical.

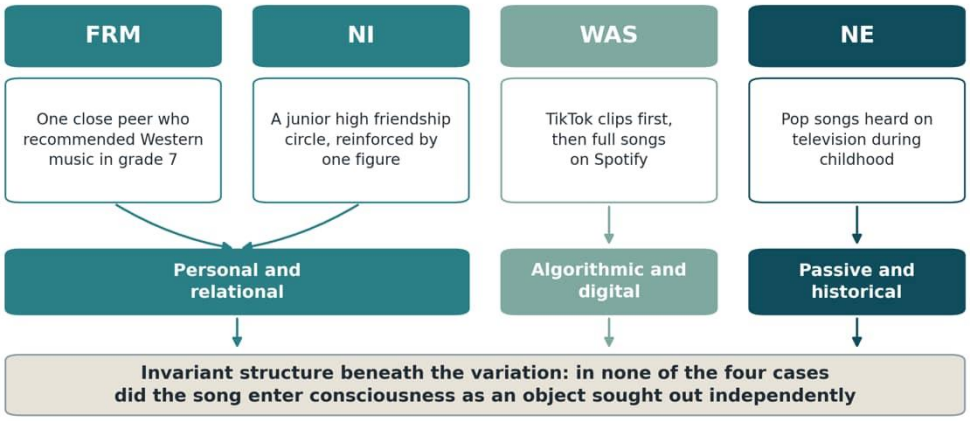


Figure 2. Typology of the pathways of initial interest

The second theme concerns playlist curation. Three of the four participants sorted their songs into thematic playlists separated by mood, and did so with an explicitly regulatory purpose.

"So there is a specific playlist for that, a melancholic playlist. When I listen to that, if I am studying or doing an activity, I do not listen to sad songs, because my mood would get carried away." (FRM)

NI, by contrast, kept a single mixed playlist and felt no need to separate songs by mood. The degree of deliberateness varied even among those who did sort: FRM and WAS organised their collections intentionally from the outset, while NE's arrangement grew more organically over time.

The third theme is the spectrum of engagement modes. FRM treated singing as essential to listening, and NI listened while deliberately tracking the meaning of the lyrics. NE and WAS listened mainly in the background, to accompany studying or sleeping. Neither position was fixed. NE moved toward active attention when a new song caught him, and WAS did so when she needed to understand lyrics in order to produce her own content. Panel (a) of Figure 3 places each participant along this continuum, and panel (b) reports the observation record, which showed the widest behavioural variation in WAS and the narrowest in NI.

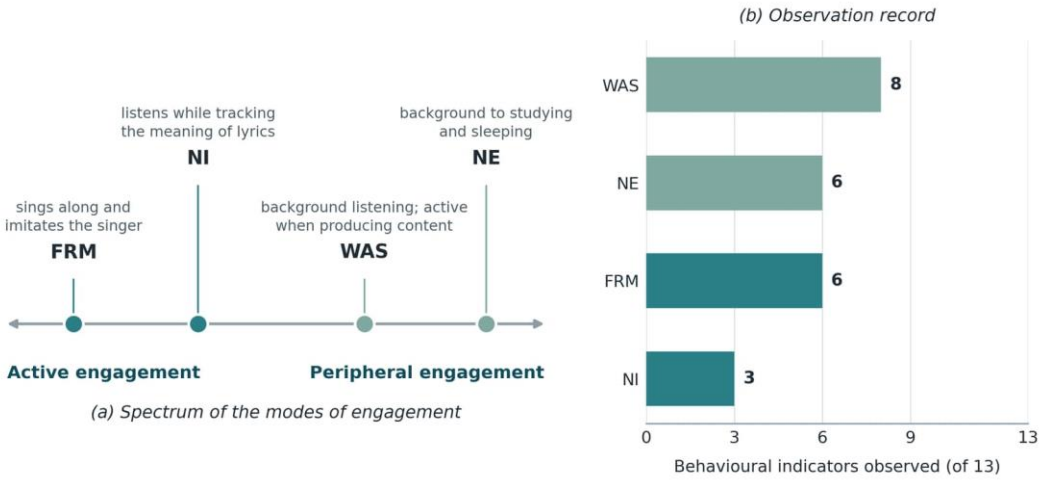


Figure 3. Modes of engagement across participants and the observation record

The fourth theme concerns repetition. All four participants replayed particular songs, yet their motives diverged. For FRM, repeated listening to Dollhouse drove a progressively deeper reinterpretation of its meaning. For NI, repeating My Love was a matter of aesthetic and auditory pleasure alone, unconnected to any preference for its lyrical theme.

"I thought it was a fun song, but it turned out to be a song that was rather complex, complicated actually." (FRM)

"I do not know why, I do not like love songs, but I do not know why this song feels so nice to listen to." (NI)

NE replayed About You five or six times a day until it became his top song on Spotify, while WAS repeated a new favourite intensely but briefly, until she tired of it and it was replaced. The fifth theme concerns chosen times. Three participants named night or the period before sleep as the most comfortable moment, and for the same reason in each case, namely the quiet. NE reported a related pattern with a different purpose, playing a single playlist of roughly seven hours to accompany sleep through the night.

3) Perception of songs as an informal learning medium

Four themes emerged under the second research question. All participants regarded English pop songs as serving both entertainment and learning, though the proportion and firmness of that conviction differed sharply. FRM and NI stated the balance plainly.

"For me it is fifty to fifty. It can be a learning medium, it can be an entertainment medium." (FRM)

NE was far more guarded, and connected his caution to a general dislike of English lessons. WAS produced the most distinctive pattern of the four, since her conviction shifted visibly between her two sessions, from hesitancy to affirmation.

"Not yet, I think. It has not really had that much influence, actually. Because I myself am not that into English." (WAS, first session)

"Yes. It really helps. Earlier I looked up the meaning of the words from the songs first, and that can help with learning." (WAS, second session)

The second theme concerns transfer into formal settings. Three participants described concrete moments when knowledge acquired informally surfaced in school work, even though it had never been acquired for that purpose. A line of lyric appeared in an examination item for FRM, vocabulary from a song was recognised in a try-out by NI, and WAS drew on both vocabulary and speaking when asked to make an English video. NE reinforced the theme from a different angle, explaining that vocabulary is not taught directly at school and has to be worked out independently.

The third theme produced the sharpest disagreement in the study. Asked which felt more natural, songs or the formal classroom, the participants did not differ by degree along one scale. FRM and NE reached directly opposing judgements, while NI and WAS each divided the question along a different axis. Table 3 sets the four positions side by side.

Table 3. Contrasting directions of comparison between song-based and classroom learning

Participant	Judged more natural	Reason given by the participant	Structural reading
FRM	Songs	Songs do not foreground the process of learning, whereas formal classroom learning is sometimes tedious	Freedom from evaluative pressure is construed as the central strength of the informal space
NE	The formal classroom	A degree of pressure compels seriousness and yields more direct understanding, whereas songs require repeated listening	The same pressure that FRM avoids is construed as productive for comprehension
NI	Divided	Enjoyment comes from songs, but speaking is better learned formally because the teacher can be asked directly	Authority for verifying pronunciation remains located in the formal setting
WAS	Songs, for the process of translation	Self-directed translation is more relaxed than the fear of being called on without	Anxiety about sudden evaluation, rather than the medium itself, shapes the comparison

		warning, and phones are not permitted in class	

The disagreement matters because it shows that the relation between informal and formal learning spaces is personal and cannot be generalised uniformly. For FRM, freedom from evaluative pressure was the central strength of the informal space. For NE, that very same pressure was what made comprehension possible.

The fourth theme concerns social reinforcement. Two participants independently named the same classmate, Salsa, as someone whose fluency they attributed to her habit of singing. Conviction about songs as a learning medium was therefore not formed in isolation. It was confirmed by watching other people's experience within the same social network, which gives the meaning-making process an intersubjective dimension.

4) Contribution to the development of speaking skills

Five themes emerged under the third research question. Three participants named speaking, and within it pronunciation and fluency, as the aspect that had improved most.

"The one that improved the most was my speaking. So from there I started learning pronunciation." (FRM)

"Before, I used to find it really hard to pronounce English. And now, from learning through English songs, I am fluent." (NI)

The primary mechanism of transfer was therefore articulatory rather than grammatical. A second theme specifies how pronunciation was actually acquired. FRM and NI shared the same affective trigger, a feeling of strangeness on hearing their own error while singing, but resolved it differently. FRM sought external verification by searching online, whereas NI developed an internal compensation strategy of dropping a difficult syllable before reconnecting the word.

A third theme concerns vocabulary transfer into ordinary conversation. All participants reported using words or expressions from lyrics spontaneously with friends, and a recurring pattern deserves critical attention: for FRM and NI the vocabulary carried over was largely slang, some of it coarse. WAS reported a different register, with neutral expressions such as what if entering her conversations, and NE confirmed that the practice was collective rather than individual, with lyrics quoted among peers almost daily to liven up conversation.

The most prominent theme under this question is the reduction of speaking anxiety, which operated through a mechanism worth stating precisely. Social comparison with a more fluent peer began as a source of insecurity and then reversed direction, so that the same peer became a model.

"Before, I used to be quite a shy person, because I felt insecure, my friends were better at English than me. From there I became braver, braver to sing. So I became more confident in my speaking, and my lack of confidence and anxiety were greatly reduced." (FRM)

Figure 4 traces this movement and records that it did not run to completion in all four participants. Table 4 sets out the initial condition, the mechanism of change, and the outcome for each, so that the difference between a complete and a

partial transformation can be traced to the intensity of personal engagement rather than to exposure alone.



Figure 4. The reversed social comparison mechanism in the reduction of speaking anxiety

Table 4. Degrees of speaking anxiety reduction across the participants

Participant	Initial condition	Mechanism of change	Condition at the time of the study	Degree
FRM	Shy and insecure because peers were better at English	Shared engagement with the same music; courage built through singing	Confident, with transfer into an exchange with a foreign speaker in Bali	Complete
NI	Insecure because a peer spoke English fluently	The peer reconstrued as a model; self-directed learning through lyrics	Describes herself as fluent and more confident	Complete
NE	Quite afraid to speak during junior high school	Enjoyment derived from songs carried over into speaking	Somewhat more confident, yet still afraid of mispronunciation and accent	Partial
WAS	Afraid to speak, particularly when called on	Gradual, and articulated more firmly across the two interview sessions	Helped to a degree, yet fear persists in sudden speaking situations	Partial

The final theme concerns transfer into authentic communication. FRM described an unplanned exchange with a foreign speaker in Bali in which he drew on a phrase remembered from a Bruno Mars song, slang included, and was understood. The other participants did not report an equivalent encounter outside school, though WAS and NE described a semi-authentic parallel in a video assignment and in spontaneous everyday use at school. FRM's account remains

the strongest evidence in the dataset that the competence formed through songs was functional rather than performative.

5) The essence of the experience

Three invariant structures hold beneath the variation, and they are set out together in Figure 5. The first is a layered intentionality. English pop songs first appeared as an object offered by an external intermediary and were then lived through and internalised as part of daily life and identity. No participant sought the songs out independently, yet all built playlists, routines, and personal meanings far exceeding that initial entry point.

The second structure is the function of songs as a safe space in which to practise being someone who speaks English. Free from evaluative pressure, students could mispronounce words, attempt unfamiliar ones, and sing sentences they did not yet fully understand without risk of judgement. This structure is most explicit in FRM, who felt no embarrassment at making mistakes, and is traceable in WAS, who found independent learning more relaxed than being called on in class, and in NI, who developed a private compensation strategy rather than expose herself. Even NE, who judged the classroom more natural because of its pressure, acknowledged that singing made him enjoy speaking more than he had in junior high school.

The third structure is individual variation itself. The opposing judgements of FRM and NE about naturalness, the differing motives for repetition between FRM and NI, and the differing degrees of conviction across the group were not disturbances to the essence. They constitute it. What endures beneath the variation is not a shared form of experience but a structure of openness, the capacity of English pop songs to serve as a learning space elastic enough to be entered and given meaning differently by each student while consistently cultivating the courage to speak.

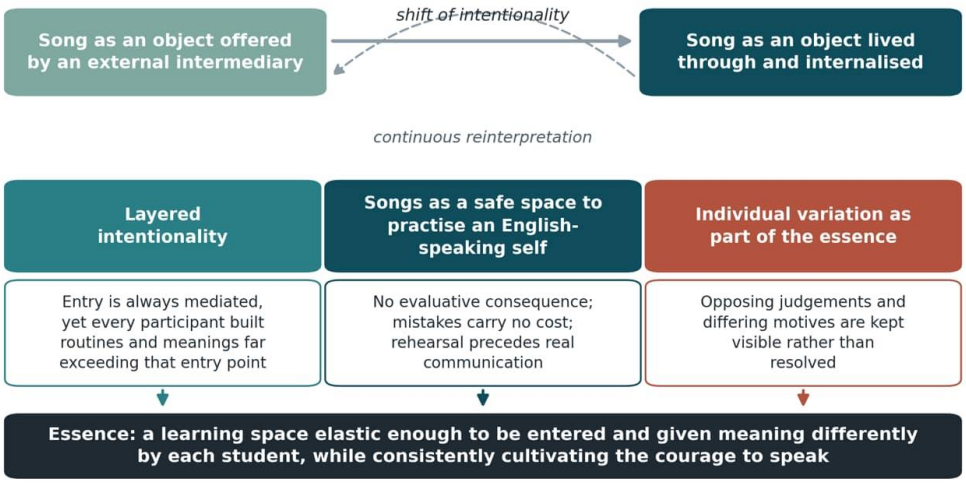


Figure 5. The structure of the essence of the students' experience

6) Triangulation across the three techniques

Table 5 summarises the convergences and tensions produced by technique triangulation. The tension in NI's case is presented rather than smoothed away,

since concealing the divergence between her verbal account and her observational record would misrepresent the way credibility was actually established. Her observation session was brief and quiet, and the limited behavioural variation recorded there is read as evidence that informal linguistic behaviour is situational, not as a defect in the data.

Table 5. Matrix of technique triangulation across the four participants

Participant	Interview (verbal account)	Observation (behavioural record)	Documentation (playlist)	Result
FRM	Reports a consistent habit of singing along and imitating pronunciation	Observed singing spontaneously and discussing songs with enthusiasm	Verifies the artists named in the interview	Convergent
NI	Reports very active verbal engagement with lyrics and their meanings	Three of thirteen indicators, the most limited variation among the four	Verifies genre preference and the Oasis songs mentioned	Tension, read as situational
NE	Reports predominantly background listening and ambivalence toward English lessons	Six of thirteen indicators	Verifies a playlist of roughly seven hours used for sleeping	Convergent
WAS	Reports the most spontaneous use of English expressions among the participants	Eight of thirteen indicators, the widest variation among the four	Verifies separate playlists for sad and cheerful songs	Convergent

b. Discussion

The plural entry pathways found here support the view that English exposure among Indonesian Generation Z runs through interwoven digital and social ecosystems rather than a single channel (Wolanin, 2025). A social intermediary was present at almost every entry point, which is consistent with the position that engagement with popular cultural content is embedded within broader social networks (Hiver et al., 2021). The habit of sorting playlists by mood, found in three of the four participants, adds a dimension that outcome-focused research has tended to leave aside. Songs were not only a source of language input. They were an actively curated instrument for managing affect, which extends discussion beyond the cognitive and linguistic effects that dominate the literature (Purwantoro et al., 2025). Variation in the motives behind repetition points in the same direction, since repetition

in song-based learning turned out to cover several distinct subjective processes rather than one (Kumar et al., 2022).

On the second research question, the dual function reported by all participants aligns with findings that learners see consumption of English media as entertaining and language-building at the same time (Aprilia et al., 2025). The variation in the firmness of that belief, however, ran deeper than questionnaire-based studies typically report. NE's caution and the visible development of WAS's conviction across two sessions are difficult to capture through instruments that record a perception once and treat it as settled, which is an argument for approaches able to follow the formation of perception rather than only its end state (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Transfer of informally acquired knowledge into school tasks, reported by three participants, is consistent with the position that much second language vocabulary is acquired outside the classroom through learner-initiated exposure (Reynolds, 2023). NE's account of the absence of explicit vocabulary instruction gives that finding a structural reading: songs filled a gap left by a curriculum oriented toward exercises and texts, which matches evidence that Indonesian EFL learners turn to digital platforms for exposure their classrooms do not provide (Nugroho et al., 2020).

The most significant result under the second question is the contradiction between FRM and NE about which setting felt more natural. A synthesis that resolved this contradiction would misrepresent the data. Freedom from evaluative pressure was the strength of the informal space for one participant and the reason it worked less well for the other, whose comprehension depended on precisely that pressure. Dispositions toward English and levels of language anxiety therefore shape how informal and formal spaces are construed relative to each other, and the relation between the two cannot be generalised uniformly across students.

On the third research question, the salience of pronunciation and fluency reinforces earlier findings that intensive engagement with English songs contributes to articulation quality and speaking fluency (Kitjaroonchai & Sukman, 2025; Siki et al., 2024). The self-verification mechanism in FRM and NI adds something to that account. The drive to correct pronunciation arose from discomfort at hearing one's own error while singing, which makes imitation an active production mechanism rather than passive exposure to a phonological model (Judijanto et al., 2024). The dominance of informal and sometimes coarse vocabulary in the transfer from lyrics to conversation deserves critical attention as well, since it shows that such transfer is not uniformly beneficial in academic terms and that the register carried across matters alongside the quantity of vocabulary acquired (Kumar et al., 2022).

The reversal of social comparison is the finding with the clearest theoretical value. Work on language anxiety among EFL students has generally treated anxiety as an obstacle without tracing concrete pathways by which it recedes through ordinary informal activity (Indahyanti et al., 2023). What the data show here is a specific pathway: a peer who initially made the participant feel inadequate became a model once the participant had a low-stakes space in which to rehearse. FRM's exchange with a foreign speaker in Bali is textural evidence that speaking fluency is not solely a product of formal instruction but also of experience internalised emotionally and personally (Feng & Guo, 2022).

Taken together, the findings affirm the relevance of the Husserlian framework that underlies the study. The shift of intentionality, from song as offered object to song as lived object, shows consciousness continuously constructing and reconstructing meaning toward the same object over time rather than receiving it passively (Taufiqurrahman, 2022). Consistent application of epoché allowed contradiction among participants to be preserved rather than homogenised into a tidier narrative, which is what phenomenological inquiry requires when its aim is to understand how a phenomenon is lived rather than how effective a medium is (Bonyadi, 2023).

Several limitations bound these claims. The four participants came from one school and shared similar age and grade levels, so the findings are an in-depth portrait of specific experiences rather than a basis for statistical generalisation (Malterud et al., 2016). Observation was limited to a single brief session per participant in one setting, which is why spontaneous linguistic behaviour was not always visible, as NI's record shows. Evidence about the contribution to speaking rests entirely on perception and self-report rather than standardised assessment, which leaves room for recall bias, though this is consistent with the aims of phenomenological inquiry. The month-long collection period was sufficient for rich description at one point in time but not for observing how these experiences develop over a longer span.

4. Conclusion

Students' experience of listening to English pop songs was personal and layered, and it developed gradually from a leisure activity into part of an emotional daily routine. Initial interest was never entirely self-generated. It was facilitated in every case by a social or digital intermediary, after which the participants built listening routines of their own, with night emerging as the most frequently chosen moment.

Perceptions of songs as an informal learning medium were constructed rather than given. All participants recognised a dual function, yet the degree of conviction differed considerably, from a firm balance in two cases to a cautious and even ambivalent stance in another, and to a conviction that visibly developed across two interview sessions in the fourth.

The contribution to speaking was reported in pronunciation and fluency, with imitation of the original singer working as an active production mechanism and informal vocabulary carrying over into everyday conversation. The most significant contribution, though, was affective. Speaking anxiety receded through a reversal of social comparison, completely for two participants and partially for the other two, and in one case the competence built through songs transferred into an authentic exchange with a foreign speaker outside school.

The essence of the phenomenon lies in a shift in the intentionality of consciousness, from songs as an object offered by external intermediaries to an object actively lived and internalised as part of everyday identity. Within this space, free from evaluative pressure, students practise pronouncing and inhabiting English as part of themselves. That essence is never uniform. It is refracted through the disposition, motives, and personal context each student brings, and the variation is not a deviation from the essence but what the essence consists of, namely a learning space elastic enough to be entered differently by each student while consistently nurturing the courage to speak a language that is not the mother tongue.

Two implications follow. Teachers may treat popular culture as a supplement that bridges explicitly taught competence and the communicative needs students actually meet, particularly where explicit vocabulary instruction is thin. Researchers may extend this work

across more than one school, over a longer period, and in combination with standardised assessment, provided the depth of subjective meaning-making that gives phenomenology its value is not sacrificed in the process.

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